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ABSTRACT

The junior high and senior high school English teacher should not judge dialect speakers as inferior to speakers of standard English but should rather be concerned with teaching his students the power and use of dialects. At the same time, he should capitalize on the students' dialect skills to teach them standard English skills. Teaching Activities which further these aims are: (1) teaching the distinctions among language, dialect, and idiolect (the personal use of Language); (2) exploring the uses of dialect in literature; (3) training students to develop their own linguistic atlas of their area, city, or state; (4) teaching the history of the English language; (5) conducting language mediation exercises to classify and study--without prescriptive judgments--the dialects of members of the class; and (6) using personal language charts, work charts, narrative charts, and language skill charts. Through such activities as these, students from different ethnic groups and races can use dialect study to profitably learn about each other's heritages. (DI)

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## WHAT CAN THE ENGLISH TEACHER DO WITH DIALECTS

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My mamma is a big woman, t<sup>r</sup> and stout, and  
men like her cause she soft and fluffy-looking.  
When she round them it all smiles and dimples and  
her mouth be looking like it couldn't never be  
fixed to say nothing but darling and honey.

They see her now, they sho see something  
different. I should not even come today. Since  
I had Larry things ain't been too good between us.  
But - that's my mamma and I know she gon be there  
when I need her. And sometime when I come it okay.  
But this ain't gon be one a them times. Her eyes  
looking all ove me and I know it coming. She  
snort cause she want to say god damn but she don't  
cuss. "When it due, Martha?"

(Shirley Williams, "Tell Martha Not to Moan")

Can you imagine a black, teenage girl rehearsing to tell her black  
mamma in white, middle-class English, that she is pregnant?

My mother is a tall, fat woman who likes men.  
When she is near men she looks as though she  
could never be angry. Those men should see her  
now. Things have not been the same between my  
mother and me since I have had Larry, but I can  
always count on her when I need her. She will  
look me over and then say, "When are you due,  
Martha?"

Native speakers of English understand both of these passages, the first  
written in a black dialect by a black author, the other written in standard  
English by a white teacher of English.

These two contrasting paragraphs help us define dialect in a functional  
way. First, we can see that both passages are written in the same language,  
in this case, the English language. The second passage, though not formal,  
is written in a "schoolse," consultative register. The first passage is  
written in an intimate register and in a dialect appropriate to conversation  
between two black speakers. Second, we see that dialect is appropriate between  
natural speakers of that dialect. Speakers of the same dialect understand and  
speak the dialect because they know the vocabulary and grammatical system of  
that dialect. For example, in the first paragraph, there are reoccurrences

ED 078421

of certain grammatical deviations from standard English:

1. Omission of affix: be-, a-, etc.  
 . . . men like her cause she . . .  
 . . . she snort cause she . . .  
 . . . when she round them . . .
2. Omission of the copula (verb be)  
 . . . she soft . . .  
 . . . she round them . . .  
 . . . it all smiles . . .
3. be + V+ -ing for always  
 . . . her mouth be looking . . .
4. Double or triple negative  
 . . . it couldn't never be fixed to say nothing . . .
5. Omission of -s for third person singular.  
 She snort . . .  
 . . . she don't . . .
6. gon for going to  
 . . . she gon be there . . .  
 . . . this ain't gon be . . .

This is not a complete list of the features of the black English dialect, but it helps us see the third characteristic of dialect, that vocabulary and grammar of a dialect are not arbitrary. The features of a dialect are systematic and carry meaning.

Dialects should not be confused with register. All speakers of a language, no matter what the dialect, speak in different registers, depending upon the purposes of the communication. Students of English must learn to have accurate control of a number of English registers, one for the intimacy of family and friends, one for the impersonal casualness of business, classroom, or other daily routines, one for the technical intricacies of the work world, and one for high culture such as the great literary tradition, religion, or philosophy, and one for the "chapter and verse" type of recitation used in legal, political, religious, and academic prose.

Although English has consistently occupied an official position in American life, English has not always been the traditional, habitual, and

customary language for all expressions of human behavior for all American citizens. Conservative estimates from the 1960 census indicate that nineteen million white Americans have another tongue other than English. About a third of our population are first generation speakers of English. The largest portion of those members of our society whose roots in English are as much as three generation are the recently urbanized and dislocated negro and the small town southern white. Both of these groups show a lack of control of school English, distance from a literate heritage, and alienation from society and from school.

The teacher of English is a mediator of language experiences in the classroom and for this reason alone must have a clear understanding of the variations of language and the depth and breadth of the English of his students in the classroom. It will not avail the teacher, the students, or the educational community to become involved in the "different-deficite" haggle of whether a student who speaks a dialect is different or inferior. The teacher's concern is that all students learn to use the English language so that they can become responsible, productive citizens.

To accomplish the goal of educating responsible, productive thinkers and users of the English language, the teacher must do two things: (1) teach about the power and use of dialect in the English speaking community; and (2) capitalize on students' dialect to teach them standard English language skills. The first is an easy, explanatory task. The second task involves careful planning and attention to the language development of students.

Learning about dialects should fall hard on the heels of learning about people, their culture, and their language. A good time to start talking about dialect with classes of students is in the junior high school years. As the early adolescent becomes aware of himself, he also learns about others. The junior high school student should learn the distinction between language, dialect, and idiolect (an individual's personal use of language).

To open the discussion of dialect and idiolect, I tell about John and Charles. The stories, in brief, go as follows:

John lives in the Hough area of Cleveland, Ohio. He was born thirteen years ago on a small farm outside of Augusta, Georgia, where the family lived in a small shack. One day a social worker drove by and told John's father that he could have a good 8-to-5 job in a steel mill if he moved to Cleveland. All John remembers is that one day his father piled some belongings into an old Chevy and drove to Cleveland.

John has not left the Hough neighborhood since he arrived there eight years ago. He wanders the neighborhood freely. He plays ball with other black boys in a vacant lot cluttered with the debris from a past riot.

John attends Theodore Roosevelt Junior High School where he doesn't think he is learning much. He has a hard time reading the words in his textbooks. He is good at numbers but story problems are "sad news."

There are now eleven brothers and sisters at home with John. John's father doesn't have a job like he was promised. His mother is a cleaning lady in a wealthy, white suburb. Home is for eating, sleeping and violent arguments. The gang is for friendship and talking in a secret code language. There is no need for John to think of the future.

Charles lives with his mother, father and sister in a large house in suburban Cleveland. He is thirteen and attends John F. Kennedy Junior High School.

Charles' father is an executive for a large steel company where he spends most of his time. Charles' mother is preoccupied with the health and welfare of her family and also participates in the Civic League, a club which contributes to the Cleveland Symphony and the Cleveland Museum. John's mother is the "cleaning lady" for Charles' mother. Charles and John have never met, but they know of each other.

Charles spends much time with adults. His teachers sponsor clubs and activities after school and weekends. Charles has no trouble reading his textbooks and his parents are satisfied with his



B average that will permit him to attend a nearby state university. Charles is able to take a rapid transit train downtown where he is permitted to shop for clothing and sports equipment, visit museums, or go to a movie. He can take a bus to visit friends, or to play basketball at the "Y." Charles is always planning for new activities in the future.

The students then do an I D (idiolect-dialect) concentric-circle chart for each of the boys described. The steps for making the chart are simple:

1. Draw a large circle for each boy. Put John's name above one circle, and Charles' name above the other circle.
2. Select a descriptive word to describe features of John's dialect or idiolect, of Charles' dialect or idiolect. Write these words in smaller circles within the appropriate larger circles. Code the smaller circles with an I for idiolect and a D for dialect. Number each inner circle with consecutive numbers.
3. Under each large circle, prove the idiolect-dialect description with a sentence or phrase from the story. The number of the sentence or phrase from the story must correspond to the number of the circle to which it refers.

There are enough descriptors for John and Charles to throw some deep insights into each boy's social, psychological, and language differences. This same type of concentric-circle chart can be used in talking about contrasting characters from literature.

Huck Finn is frequently taught in the junior high school English curriculum. The I D chart can be used in contrasting Huck and Jim. Mark Twain lets dialect serve as a class-caste determiner in his portrayal of Huck and Jim. Although Huck and Jim come from the poorest segment of the Southern, pre-Civil War social structure, Twain makes it clear to the reader that Jim belongs to the Negro "caste;" whereas, Huck belongs to a white "class."

Jim pronounces the initial th in they, the, them, that, as the phoneme /d/. However, Huck pronounces the same words with the /ð/ phoneme. Jim does not pronounce the final /r/; Huck pronounces the final /r/.

Twain has Jim say gwyne for going and kyerds for cards. Huck does not consistently drop final consonants, Jim does. Jim says "I wanna go" and "He coul' uv done it," which the non-negro speaker might say as, "I wanta go" and "He could uv done it."

While reading Huck Finn, students can become involved in the difference between Huck's and Jim's dialects. One way is to have students complete the following list:

<u>Jim</u>	<u>Huck</u>	<u>Jim</u>	<u>Huck</u>
yist'day	yesterday	_____	that
wid	with	think	_____
mawing	morning	arter	_____
tuck	took	_____	till
_____	was	_____	raft
ain't	_____	jedged	_____
_____	hain't	_____	or
doan	don't	fo'	for
_____	reckon	warn't	_____
_____	scarcely	_____	somewheres
b'kaze	_____	_____	other
agwyne	_____	nuther	_____
_____	twice	yit, yet	_____
_____	the	_____	here, hear
dey	_____	_____	just

Another list of Mississippi River Valley dialect words which are common to both Huck and Jim can be completed by students:

<u>Mississippi River Valley</u>	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Mississippi River Valley</u>	<u>Standard</u>
pungle	struggle	hump	_____
flinders	small pieces	churkle-head	_____
bile	splinters	brash	_____
blow	boil	blethers	_____
wrench	_____	hive, hove	_____
	_____		

shirk	_____	truck	_____
snake	_____	fetch	_____
clean	_____	situation	_____

When students read Dicken's Great Expectations in the ninth or tenth grade and Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge in the twelfth grade, similar types of social class lists can also be used.

#### Great Expectations

<u>Low Social Class</u>	<u>High (Aspiring) Social Class</u>
wittles	victuals
particklers	particulars
convict	convict
How air you?	How are you?
You are a-going	You are going
fur	for
wos	was
yourn	your
winegar	vinegar
welwet	velvet
wery	very
'ealth	health
'ead	head

#### The Mayor of Casterbridge

<u>Low Social Class</u>	<u>High (Aspiring) Social Class</u>
maister	master
ye	you
yer	your
zeed, zee	saw, seen
Henchet	Henchard
afore	before
a-selling	selling
bruckle	frail
kearorn	windpipe
larry	confusion
gawkhammer	awkward
lelry	tired

Students in English classes in the secondary schools should be shown that dialect in literature is skillfully used for more than local color. The uses of dialect in literature can be divided into four categories: (1) A writer uses his natural dialect in his written discourse without knowing that he is writing in what is or might become a dialect of the standard form of the language. An example of this use of dialect in literature is Chaucer's Canterbury Tales or a slave narrative by Josiah Henson. (2) A writer consciously uses dialect of a locale mainly to create a pure form of a dialect literature; an example of this is the poetry of Robert Burns or the Uncle Remus stories.—(3) A writer introduces dialect speakers as a purely artistic device to create "local color" background



in attempting to achieve verisimilitude for the tale. This use of dialect on the printed page is called "eye dialect." (4) A writer uses dialect to convey psychological and sociological aspects of dialect. Willa Cather uses this technique to show how her characters are slowly being Americanized in My Antonia.

In the ninth and tenth grades, when students in English classes are still very active, teachers can train some of these students to be young dialectologists. The technique is simple. A bicycle, a small cassette tape recorder, and a check list will help students develop their own linguistic atlas of their area, city, or state.

A linguistic atlas field worker gathers his information in a face to face interview, with an informant, which can be recorded on a tape cassette. Steps are simple:

1. A standardized questionnaire is used to gather some statistics on each informant: (a) name or identification code; (b) sex; (c) race; (d) age; (e) highest grade level reached in school; (f) state, county, town; (g) how long in area and where lived before; (h) parents' birthplace[s] and occupa [s]; (i) what other language spoken; (j) your occupation.
2. A list of vocabulary items, and grammatical items are used for collecting data.

The informant is asked such simple questions as, "What do you call a brown paper container that your groceries are carried home in?" The informant can be asked to fill in the expansion he uses in a sentence, such as:

John is \_\_\_\_\_ university. (in, in the, up to the)

3. A passage should be available for the informant to read and to record on the audio tape.
4. A casual conversation or narrative about a familiar topic with the informant should be recorded.
5. The linguistic atlas will be constructed by indicating the occurrence of terms and vocabulary on a big map of the area.

Before attempting this linguistic atlas work, students should be given Roger Shuy's Discovering American Dialects, and two recordings, America Speaking and Our Changing Language, all three available through the National Council of Teachers of English.

Although a study of the history of the English language is not a study of the dialects of English, it will soon become clear to the student of the history of English that three Middle English dialects eventually gave way to a standard London English. Students hypotheses concerning the cause of this change should include the following: (1) the economic development of London; (2) the presence of the court; and (3) the heavy population of London. Schoolmasters and grammarians can be held accountable for the stratification of dialect along social levels. A comparison of English language textbooks published over the past years will offer a good insight into how teachers and their textbooks can determine social correctness in language.

Another contrasting activity can show how geographic isolation and lack of education can hold back dialect change. The isolated mountain people from the Appalachians preserve more of the Elizabethan English than any other English speaking area. Although this is rapidly changing, some expressions are still found in Appalachian dialect and in Shakespeare's works:

<u>Appalachian</u>	<u>Shakespeare</u>	
spare grass	spear grass	(1 H1V, II, iv)
sass (to scold)	sauce	(AYLI, III, v)
bum-hole	bung-hole	(H, V, i)
pond my honor	pawn my honor	(CY, I, vi)
God amighty!	God almighty	(2H, VI, II, i)
pity's sake or mercy sakes alive	mercy sake	(MWW, III, i)
poke (paper bag)	pocket	(AYLI, II, vii)
hit (babies and small animals)	it	
holp (help)	holp	(C, IV, vi)
thoughten	thoughten	(P, IV, vi)

This is only a sample of parallel Appalachian and Shakesperian words. Using dialect as a device in teaching dialect speakers standard English

language skills requires special training and an attitude toward the use of "correct," middle-class English in the classroom. In no place in our definition of a dialect is there the notion of language inferiority or deficit. A group of dialect speaking students are as fluent and creative users of language as are a group of standard speaking students.

The black, the Latino, the Indian, and the white students come to school with different degrees of language development and with different dialects of English. The teacher must accept each student's level of language development and the dialect he brings to school. The teacher of English must also be aware of the language ability of each dialect speaking student. A contrastive analysis of the student's dialect and standard English is useful. Baratz provides us with a model for contrasting the syntax between two dialect systems; in this case, Standard English and Negro nonstandard:

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Standard English</u>	<u>Negro Nonstandard</u>
1. Linking Verb	He is going.	He goin'.
2. Possessive Marker	John's cousin.	John cousin.
3. Plural Marker	I have five cents.	I got five cent .
4. Subject Expression	John lives in New York.	John he live in New York.
5. Verb Form	I drank the milk.	I drunk the-milk.
6. Past Marker	Yesterday he walked home.	Yesterday he walk home.
7. Verb Agreement	He runs home. She has a bicycle.	He run home. She have a bicycle.
8. Future Form	I will go home.	I'ma go home.
9. "If" Construction	I asked if he did it.	I asked did he do it.
10. Negation	I don't have any He didn't go.	I don't got none. He ain't go.
11. Indefinite Article	I want an apple.	I want a apple.
12. Pronoun Form	We have to do it. His book.	Us got to do it. He book.
13. Preposition	He is over at his friend's house. He teaches at Francis Pool.	He over to his friend house. He teach Francis Pool.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Standard English</u>	<u>Negro Nonstandard</u>
14. Be	He is here all the time.	He be here.
15. Do	No, he isn't.	No, he don't.

Since dialect, nonnative, and native speakers of English show many similar deviations from standard English, it is profitable for a teacher to have a Dialect Deviation Analysis Sheet for his students so that he can plan language mediation activities appropriate to individual student's needs. The teacher can ditto off a supply of the following Dialect Deviation Analysis Sheets. Using one or more sheets per student, the teacher can fill in examples of each student's dialect deviations as made in speech, in oral reading, or as interference in writing.

Language mediation exercises can be prepared or found for each type of dialect deviation which appears for a student or groups of students. Feigenbaum's English Now is an invaluable source and model for preparing these types of lessons for dialect speakers.

Suppose there are students who show occurrences of deviation #16, omit -s for person-number concord, especially do for does. Here are some possible exercises:

### Translation Drill

Answer out loud. If you hear the formal, say the informal. If you hear the informal, say the formal. Listen for the correct answer to check yourself.

- |                     |         |                  |           |
|---------------------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| 1. Yes, he does.    | [pause] | Yes, he do.      | (student) |
| 2. No, he do not.   | [pause] | No, he does not. | (student) |
| 3. Yes, she do.     | [pause] | Yes, she does.   | (student) |
| 4. No, he does not. | [pause] | No, he do not.   | (student) |

### Formal-Informal Distinction, Same-Different

Say "same" or "different" after each pair of words you hear.

- No, he don't.  
No, he doesn't.
- Yes, he does.  
Yes, he do.
- Yes, she does.  
Yes, she does.

### Dialect Deviation Analysis Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Father's Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Language/Dialect: \_\_\_\_\_ Reading Ability: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Language Ability: \_\_\_\_\_

Deviation Description	Example of Student's Dialect Deviation Occurrence	Occurrence	
		Yes	No
1. No distinction between initial /ə/, /t/, /f/, /s/.	John a fin man.		
2. No distinction between medial /ʒ/, /d/, /v/, /z/.	John gots a brover.		
3. No distinction between <u>bird-Boyd</u> , <u>curl-coil</u> .	She has a coil on her fore-head.		
4. Drop initial weak stress syllable preceding primary stress, <u>professor=fessor</u> , <u>reporter=porter</u> .	Mr. Frank fessor at Columbia.		
5. Over stress on weak syllable preceding primary stress. <u>po-lice</u> , <u>gui-tar</u> , <u>in-surance</u> .	John called the po-lice.		
6. Heavy stress on final weak syllable, <u>accident</u> , <u>president</u> .	We voted for the <u>president</u> of the class.		
7. Drop -s plural marker	Two boy played catch.		
8. Drop 's possessive marker.	That Joe ball.		
9. Analogy of /-n/ in <u>mine</u> to other possessive pronouns, <u>ourn</u> , <u>yourn</u> , <u>hism</u> , <u>hern</u> , <u>theirn</u> .	That pencil is yourn.		
10. Analogy of possessive form in all relexive pronouns, <u>hissself</u> .	Those people hate their-selves.		
11. Substitute <u>them</u> for <u>those</u> .	Them boys tease them girls.		
12. Compound demonstratives, <u>that-there</u> , <u>them-there</u> .	Them-there teachers scare me.		
13. Analyze inflected comparisons, <u>wonderfullest</u> , <u>lovingest</u>	Her kitten is the lovingest.		
14. Double-comparison, <u>a more prettier dress</u> .	Charlie is the most ugliest man.		
15. No distinction of person-number concord with verb <u>Be</u> .	We is here. You was at work.		
16. Omit -s for person-number concord.	He say I no good. Yes, he do.		
17. Omit /- <u>ing</u> / of present participle.	He open a can a sardines.		
18. Omit /- <u>t</u> -, <u>-ed</u> -, <u>-ad</u> / of past participle.	Mr. Crosbey has stop teaching.		



19. Omit <u>Be</u> forms before predicate nominatives and adjectives.	She a nice teacher. He handsome.		
20. Omit <u>Be</u> forms before present and past participle.	I going home. The car stalled.		
21. Use <u>Be</u> before present participle to mean habitual action.	I be working for Mr. Charlie.		
22. Omit <u>Be</u> and <u>Have</u> forms before been.	He been driving a Chevy.		
23. Substitute <u>been</u> , <u>done</u> , or <u>done been</u> for <u>have</u> .	Sam done been driving a truck.		

### Writing Skill Distinction

1. They have a class on Friday. [No, they don't or do not.]
2. He doesn't understand this lesson. [Yes, he does.]
3. Our English books have good stories. [\_\_\_\_\_.]
4. Your car has a flat tire. [\_\_\_\_\_.]

Language experience reading and writing activities which are started in the elementary grades should be carried into the junior high school and high school but in different forms. Lee and Allen tell us that in the elementary school, teachers help their students write and read: (1) Personal Language Charts; (2) Work Charts; (3) Narrative Charts; and (4) Language Skill Charts. For dialect speakers I have outlined the following principles for using the language experience approach to teaching reading and writing.

1. The teacher records on a cassette tape the child's language.
2. The teacher edits and writes the personal experience or narrative so that the child can read the chart back to the teacher or other children.
3. The teacher uses traditional orthography for the language experience charts. The child's words are spelled according to standard orthography. If a child says /fiʃɪ/, the teacher writes fishing. When the child pronounces the word from the language chart, the teacher can expect to hear /fiʃɪ/.
4. The teacher remains as faithful as possible to a child's morphology and syntax. In cases where pronunciation makes the syntax or morphology difficult to determine, such as "I gots a book" or "I got the book," the teacher selects the more standard form for transcribing on the child's language chart.
5. In producing a language experience chart, the teacher can select out and rearrange the child's ideas, but the sentences and the experiences that the child reads are to be recognizable as the child's.

As the dialect speaking child reads and writes his own dialect and as he also attempts to read and write standard English, he will, in about the third or fourth grade level, start asking why some expressions that he

uses are different from those found in books or are not appropriate in his writing. The explanation is simple and consistent with reality. There is an informal and formal way to speak. I like to use Spoken-Written charts with expressions taken from the children's own language in order to make the transition from dialect to standard English in the classroom.

#### Vocabulary Chart

<u>Spoken</u>	<u>Written</u>
Elfunt	elephant
fishn	fishing
bof	both
brover	brother

#### Language Chart

<u>Spoken</u>	<u>Written</u>
I gots a brover.	I have a brother.
She goin home.	She is going home.
Yesterday we play.	Yesterday we played.
She don't got none.	She doesn't have any.

At the junior high school level, the personal experience charts become the students' journals; the narrative charts, the students' stories and poems; the students' work charts become his study guide and work schedule; his language skill charts become individualized language drill and generalizations derived from the individualized Dialect Deviation Analysis Sheets. At the junior and senior high school levels, standard speakers of English can learn to use the dialect features of their dialect speaking peers. This use of dialect should show understanding rather than ridicule.

By the time the dialect speaking student reaches high school, he should feel comfortable in using both the dialect of his ethnic community and the standard English of school and the world of work. Ethnic literature should be included in every high school literature curriculum. The choice of literature should reflect the ethnic mix of the school. The literature should be taught in a way that makes students who come from various ethnic and dialect groups proud of remembering where they come from in our pluralistic society. The following is a list of objectives which should guide the teaching of ethnic literature in high school (Grade 11 to 13 students):

#### Goals:

1. Students will identify authors representative of the ethnic group in terms of name, theme, historic period, and language or dialect.

2. Student will use class resources for continued reading of authors from various ethnic groups.
3. Students from the ethnic group which the literature represents will have a sense of pride and respect for their literary and cultural heritage. Students not from that ethnic group will have an accurate picture of another ethnic experience in America.
4. Students of different races in the class should gain an understanding of one another's ethnic features such as language, dialect, and cultural traditions.
5. Students will have a framework of knowledge for dealing with racial, ethnic, and dialectal prejudices.

The English teacher will use dialect in the classroom in two ways:

- (1) as a means of talking about dialect as a phenomena of language change and as a reflection of man's sociological, psychological, and-economic status; and (2) as a language phenomena for teaching English language skills and literature to dialect speakers in culturally and ethnically pluralistic classrooms.

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